



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

January 31, 2020

Mark Esper  
Secretary of Defense  
The Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Mark A. Milley  
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff  
The Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper and Chairman Milley,

Recent media reports that the Department of Defense is preparing to roll back long-standing U.S. policy on anti-personnel landmines, which currently limits their use to the Korean Peninsula. I would like to express my gravest concern and strongest objection to such a reversal of policy, and I urge you to reconsider changing or undermining America's longstanding policy to curtail the use of these terrible and indiscriminate weapons.

As you well know, current policy is the result of nearly three decades of studies, reviews, incremental steps, and recognition by both Republican and Democratic Presidents and Secretaries of Defense that these weapons posed unacceptable hazards both to our troops and civilian populations. Even though the United States is not party to the international treaty to ban landmines, U.S. policy over the past twenty years has consistently limited anti-personnel landmine (APL) production, export and use. In essence, our policies and actions have contributed greatly to a world moving towards a universal ban.

With respect to self-destructing APLS, I have consistently conveyed to the Pentagon and the State Department that such mines are acceptable as long as they have a man-in-the-loop mechanism for detonation and a 99% rate of self-destruction. I remember too well how during the second Persian Gulf War our own troops ran into our own minefields because the lines of battle shifted so rapidly the APLs did not have time to self-destruct. This is illustrative of the kinds of combat in which our troops most frequently engage – one of rapidly moving lines of defense or no clear battle lines at all, and with civilian populations often fleeing from one conflict area to another. For the safety of our own ground forces and innocent civilians, such self-destruct APLs should not be deployed until such man-in-the-loop mechanisms are developed, tested, and fully incorporated into these weapon systems.

In addition, the United States has earned the world's respect as the leader in landmine clearance, and we have also provided millions in support to victims of landmines and their rehabilitation. Through these programs, the United States has contributed to the reconstruction,

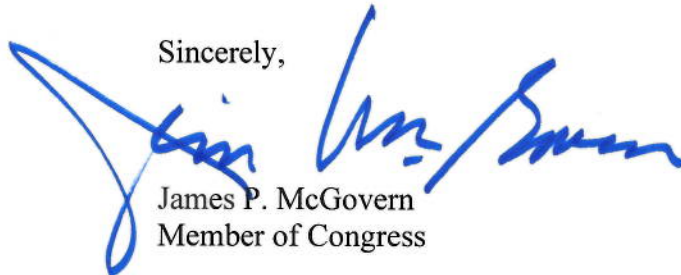
rehabilitation and reconciliation initiatives of many nations ravaged by years or decades of violence, war and conflict – including some of our own former adversaries.

Since my first day in office, I have been deeply engaged on these issues, joining the efforts of Senator Patrick Leahy and military veterans and former congressmen Lane Evans and David Bonior. No one knows better than our veterans and active duty military that there are no winners if we again begin to use APLs – not our men and women in uniform; not the civilians who become landmine victims in the aftermath; not the land and roadways that remain contaminated. To the best of my understanding, the Korean Peninsula is the only place where the Pentagon has remained steadfast in its views that APLs are essential to the defense of South Korea and U.S. security interests. While I believe we should continue exploring alternatives to APLs even for Korea, it would be a blow to U.S. global leadership -- and a boon to our enemies, rivals and rogue actors – were the United States to reverse course on the use of anti-personnel landmines outside of the Korean Peninsula.

I am proud that the United States is no longer the source of injuries and deaths caused by this indiscriminate weapon. The world is better for it. Our own military are safer for it. I urge you, in the strongest terms possible, not to undo decades of precedent on anti-personnel landmines and, instead, to continue building on the successes and advances by the United States and the global community in ending their use and creating a world where thousands of innocent civilians are no longer injured and killed each year by these brutal, indiscriminate weapons.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent request. I would be happy to meet with you to discuss these matters further and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jim McGovern", is written over the printed name.

James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress

*This is an urgent matter.*